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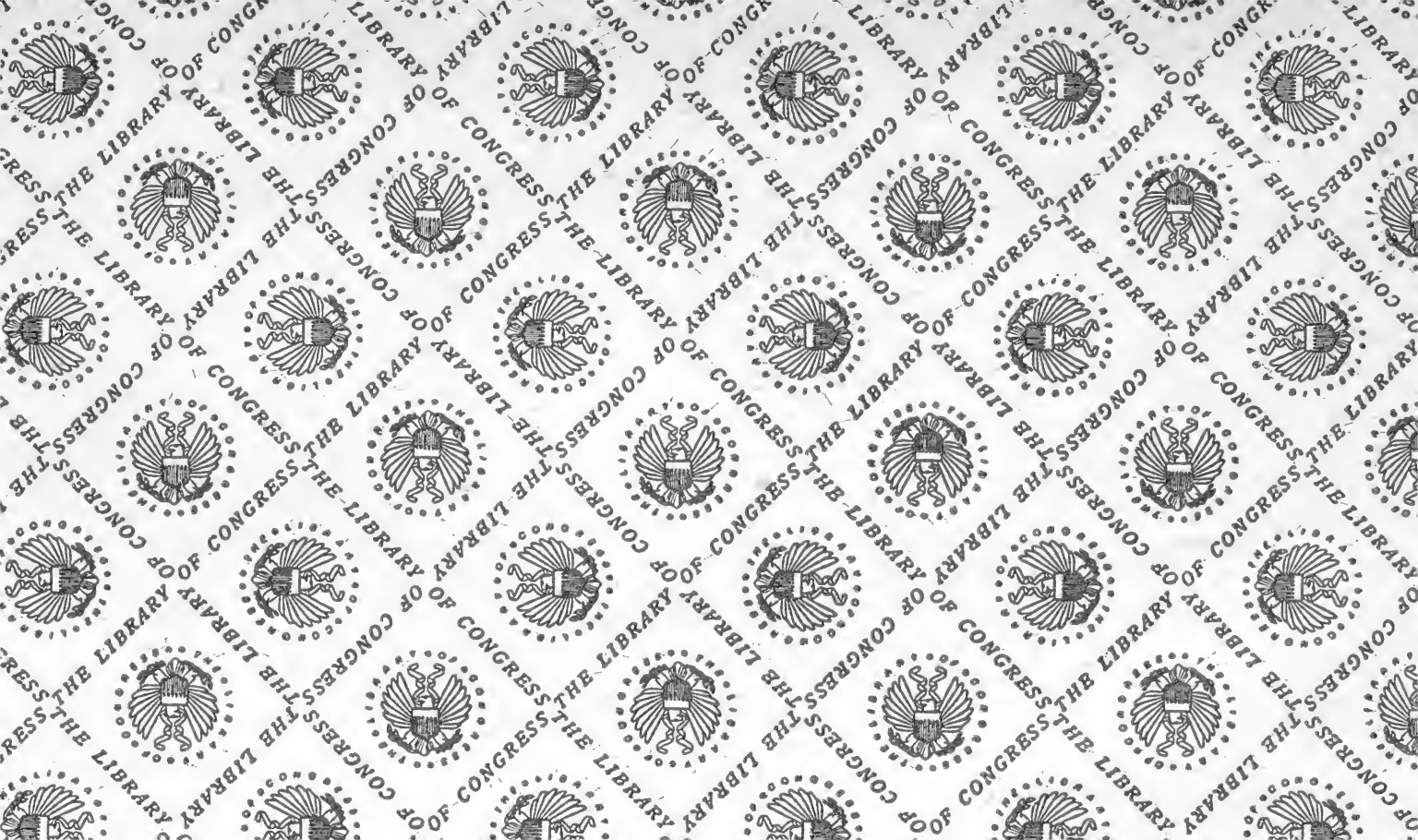
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LECTURE

ON THE

INFANT SCHOOL

SYSTEM OF EDUCATION,

AND THE EXTENT

TO WHICH IT MAY BE ADVANTAGEOUSLY APPLIED

TO ALL

PRIMARY SCHOOLS.

DELIVERED

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BY WILLIAM RUSSELL.

BOSTON:
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1830.

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LECTURE.

THE

INFANT SCHOOL SYSTEM OF EDUCATION,

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The establishment of schools adapted to the condition and capacities of infancy, is an important event, whether regarded as the commencement of a new era in the exertions of philanthrophy and charity, or the source of extensive improvement in elementary education. These schools are the field of a most interesting experiment in morals. The question is here to be answered, whether much of human evil may be avoided or averted, rather than remedied; whether, in the treatment of the mind, as well as of the body, a preventive may be substituted for a curative regimen. The momentous results connected with this new order of things, are developing in gradual but sure and encouraging succession. The physical frame of man is beginning to receive a portion of that care which is due to it, as a production of creative wisdom; the human heart begins to be regarded as the native soil of virtue, which early culture is to keep free from encroaching weeds; and the intellect begins to be treated as a self-impelling power, which education is to aid, rather than to check.

The general effect of methods founded on such views of education can, as yet, be imagined only. But even the slight progress already made, affords a wide scope to just expectation. The rational education of infancy seems destined to effect vast, though silent and unostentatious, changes on the condition of man. His physical strength and activity, his intellectual and moral tendencies, may, by this means, be brought under the influence of such modes and habits of action as shall renovate his whole character; substituting intelligent, spontaneous, and habitual virtue, with its attendant happiness, for the struggle of self-conquest, or the pain of conscious failure,—the two extremes between which the human heart has hitherto vibrated, under the influence of arbitrary education. No doubt, at least, remains, that the most successful as well as the most natural method of removing many of the evils of social life, is, to impart active habits, and an elevated character, to the minds of the poor, and to do this effectually and extensively, by means of universal early education.

As little doubt seems to remain, that the modes of elementary instruction, prevailing previous to the introduction of infant schools, were, in general, defective and inadequate; that, under their influence, the health of the body, and the natural action of the mind, were neglected; the affections left uncultivated or ill-regulated; the intellect forced into arbitrary channels, and accustomed to mechanical influences and morbid habits.

It is unnecessary to enter at present into a particular statement of the common defects of elementary education, previous to the introduction of the methods adopted in infant schools. They may be briefly summed up in the great neglect of physical accommodation, of comfort, and of health; in the small size, defective ventilation, inconvenient arrangement, and gloomy aspect of most school-rooms; their uncomfortable seats; the long continued and painful sedentary attitude of the little pupils; the entire absence of appropriate visible objects addressed to the active feelings and restless imagination of childhood; the want of cheering and invigorating exercise

a mechanical routine of application, producing little effect but on the memory, and leaving the understanding and the imagination nearly inactive; lessons presented, in general, in the form of compulsory tasks; modes of discipline retrospective rather than anticipative, repulsive, therefore, and arbitrary, not founded on reason and affection, and influencing the imagination only through the medium of fear or restraint; no social intercourse between the pupils permitted; and consequently the natural opportunities for influencing feeling and character precluded.

A well-regulated infant school furnishes a happy contrast to these defects: it exhibits a spacious, airy, cheerful, and comfortable apartment, prepared expressly for every good influence on the infant being; a frequent change of attitude and of employment; the presence of pictures and other objects calculated to inspire the mind with activity and delight, or to diffuse tranquillity and tenderness of feeling; mental employments interspersed with appropriate juvenile exercise, or judicious intervals of entire rest; lessons adapted to the capacities and desires of infancy; mental exertion rendered agreeable and voluntary; discipline consisting chiefly of rational and affectionate measures addressed to sympathy and moral feeling, and, as far as practicable, to reason, and turning upon the incidents arising from the pupils' intercourse with each other. Such are the prominent features of the system adopted in infant schools, and which, as might reasonably have been anticipated, at a time of unusual thought and inquiry on the subject of education, have commended themselves to the minds of all who have had opportunity to observe them,—which have already, to some extent, been introduced in primary and other elementary schools, and which have become a subject of peculiar interest to all who are, in any way, concerned in early education.

Before attempting to speak more particularly of the extent to which these improvements in instruction may be introduced in primary schools in this country, it will be necessary to advert

to the circumstances in which the infant schools originated, and under which they still exist, in England. There, they were introduced as a charity, designed for the benefit of the poor. Experience soon suggested, in some instances, the advantage of allowing them, in part, at least, to depend on a slight contribution from the parents of the children who are taught in them. But they continue, in general, like some of those established in cities in this country, to present themselves as institutions of benevolence, patronized by the bounty of the richer classes of society, rather than supported by the voluntary exertions of the poor themselves, or by the choice of parents in better circumstances, who prefer them to other schools, or to the common course of domestic education.

Another circumstance deserving consideration towards a proper estimation of infant schools, and the methods of instruction adopted in them, is the fact, that these schools were originally established for the benefit of a class of society among whom the advantages of any form of education had scarcely been felt,—for parents whose circumstances were, in general, such, that they felt it necessary to have their children put, as early as possible, into the way of earning something towards the support of their families. People in such a condition naturally regard even the slightest acquisition in education, as a new and unexpected benefit, and are not generally solicitous about the attainments made by their children at an elementary school, as introductory to education at schools of a higher order. But even in those cases in which infant schools are expressly intended as a preparatory step to the national schools of England, (corresponding in some respects to the primary and common schools of New England,) the initiation required at the infant schools is limited by the narrowness of education at these higher schools themselves; in few or none of which the branches of instruction, or the extent to which they are carried, are equal to those of the New England common schools, when conducted by a teacher of enterprise and intelligence.

The attempt, therefore, to transfer the infant school system as it is called, to the first stages of instruction in this country, would seem to require a consideration of the difference of the state of education here, and in England. The children of every parent in New England, may, by the auspicious arrangement of the system of public schools, receive the benefit of instruction, as soon as they are old enough to walk to the schoolhouse. What is here needed, then, in the way of improvement, is not the introduction of a new system, but the better adaptation of that which already exists, to the education of the youngest classes of scholars. All the advantages of the methods of instruction in infant schools, would be attained by adopting the *spirit* of these methods, in *primary education*. Every village school in New England, may, during the summer, if not the winter months, become an infant school, as far as such a change is desirable.

That the result, in this case, would be highly advantageous, is a point which needs no proof to those who have ever visited an infant school, and observed the intelligence, the cheerfulness, and the infantine innocence and goodness which they cherish, even when taught in a very imperfect and mechanical way.

The extent to which the infant school system may be applied to all primary schools, should be measured, not by the extent to which its routine may be borrowed or copied. The mechanism of the infant school system is, indeed, excellent in many respects. Its whole aspect is happy and inspiring, and favors the expansion of the intellect and the heart, while it promotes a healthful vigor of body. But a literal copy of its minutest details, is neither practicable nor expedient. It is of the utmost consequence, in this case, to look beyond the external routine to the internal principle. If we secure the latter, we shall not lose the benefit of the former, although we may modify it by new circumstances. Excellent as is the spirit which pervades the general system of the infant schools, there

are some points in which their details of instruction admit of much improvement,—some in which they are radically defective, or, at all events, unsuitable for the purposes of early education in New England, and, perhaps, in other parts of this country.

The objectionable points now alluded to, are chiefly comprehended in the injurious habit of learning by rote. This defect in the prevailing modes of instruction at infant schools, pervades most of the lessons, from the sublime topics of religion, or the sciences of geometry and astronomy, to the tables of arithmetic. Proof of this point may be found in the unintelligible matters of religious theory, and the obvious peculiarities of faith, which form a large portion of the catechetical instruction of infant schools,—in the fact that the lessons in geometry and astronomy are but a course of recitations in nomenclature, aided by ocular or tangible illustrations, while the tables in arithmetic are made a mere mechanical succession of sounds, dependent on an arbitrary effort of memory. By such methods of instruction children may be made to appear intelligent in subjects naturally far beyond their grasp; but the result is mere outward show. The intellect is still dormant; it must be waked, if at all, by very different expedients.

Leaving these points, which concern the understanding and the heart, we shall find, if we proceed to the departments of imagination and taste, a want, not only of felicity, but of truth and correctness, in the expedients adopted for the cultivation of this part of the intellectual constitution. Poetry, music, and pictures, might exert a fine influence on the unfolding mind of infancy, were they appropriately employed. But used as, in general, they now are, their effect is rather to degrade and pervert, than to elevate the associations of the infant mind.

The hymns prescribed as infant school exercises, are, with a few exceptions, a succession of verses which possess none of the attributes of poetry, and often fall into absolute doggerel. It is exceedingly difficult, no doubt, to find good poetry for children and infancy; but this is no reason for using that which is bad;—better that imagination should remain uncultivated, than become degraded or perverted.

The music at infant schools is seldom what it should be,—perfectly simple and perfectly correct. The ear of infancy should be attuned to the purest and best forms of music, or should be left uninfluenced. The high polish of consummate skill in this branch of art, is not necessary, it is true, in leading the voices of infants. But an early fault of taste and habit, caught from bad example, is a misfortune for life; since it entails corruption on all the mental associations connected with music.*

Of the drawings or engravings in common use at infant schools it is impossible to speak with truth, unless in terms of strong reprehension. The subjects are very often badly chosen, presenting to the eye of infancy the exhibition, sometimes, of the most degrading and horrid crimes, instead of such objects as should shed a serene and happy influence on the heart. Pictures delineating scenes in which infants cannot naturally take any interest, or which they cannot comprehend, are also in very common use. But an objection more general exists in the gross inaccuracy of the forms, and the inappropriate colors, in most pictures prepared for children. Here is an injury not barely to taste, but actually to the power of perception,—to truth and accuracy in the habits of the mind. Much improvement, it is true, has taken place, within a few years, in this branch of art. But children's picture books still abound in the most striking errors of delineation, and tend generally to hold back or mislead the mental powers, rather than to incite or assist them.

The distinguishing points of excellence in the infant school system, are found in the general plan of education on which

* Specimens of what music adapted to children should be, were given by a class of children, during the lecture of Mr Woodbridge. No person who had the happiness of hearing those simple and touching strains, can doubt in regard to the great influence of music on the juvenile mind, and the possibility of its being early and scientifically taught, or forbear to wish that such exercises may be speedily and extensively introduced in all schools for young children.

it is based, rather than its execution in detail: they consist, chiefly, in the blending of physical and moral culture with the exercise of intellect, and the embodying of all in simple and attractive forms, addressed to the imagination. The infant school system is, in these respects, an immense improvement in modes of education, which every friend to the best interests of man must wish to see transferred to all elementary schools.

To appreciate rightly the improvement effected by the introduction of this system, we must contrast its operations with those of the common modes of elementary instruction. Looking into an infant school, we observe the children employed in healthful and pleasant recreation, or enjoying a temporary repose; listening to a story inculcating the virtues of childhood; admiring a picture, or joining in a song; yielding a cheerful obedience to affectionate management; asking the artless questions which are prompted by the natural curiosity of infancy, or listening, with deep interest and attention, to their instructer's answers.

Let us turn to inspect, for a moment, a primary school, taught in the common way,—and we see usually a number of little sufferers, confined to one uncomfortable posture, for hours in succession; enduring an irksome restraint, as the condition of an escape from penalties; conning mechanically a memory lesson which they do not understand, or reciting it as mechanically; controlled in every look and action by the aspect of authority;—the whole nature of the little beings put under a discipline of repression and restraint.

To supersede this repulsive system by the other, would certainly be a most desirable step in the progress of human improvement. This result, however, is not to be attained by merely exchanging one routine for another, but by entering into the spirit of rational, affectionate, and congenial methods of early culture.

To secure the benefits of the improved system, teachers and others who can exert an influence on primary education,

should not look merely to a change of books or the introduction of apparatus, but to a general reformation of methods of education. Attention should, in the first place, be given to *the influence of health, activity, and happiness, on the developement of the infant powers.*

The situation, the size, and the arrangement of the school-house, should be the first objects on which to commence improvement. These should be divested of every hinderance to health, and, by every possible means, rendered conducive to happiness. The school-room, without and within, should favor cheerfulness and freedom, and be propitious to intellectual association.

Teachers cannot perhaps succeed in changing the situation of school-houses, so as to have them placed in spots, adapted, by retirement, shade or shelter, to a good influence, moral and intellectual, as well as physical. But they might sometimes succeed in obtaining, for the use of their little charge, permission to cultivate an adjoining piece of ground, as a happy opportunity for inculcating a practical lesson on the fruits of industry, and of leading the young mind to watch the growth and trace the forms of plants, or to observe the frame and habits of insects. Imagination and taste might here be brought under the best of influences.

But circumstances may render it impossible to attain the aid of such advantages in education. The teacher should therefore devote an assiduous attention to *the internal arrangement of the school-room;* the adaptation of its furniture to convenience and comfort; the decoration of the walls with objects calculated to exert a useful and happy influence on the mind,—especially, in the proper season, with shrubs and flowers, and other productions of nature, which necessarily excel pictures, and all forms of imitation, as the original does the copy. Pictures, however, if well executed and well chosen, are among the best means of awakening and interesting the mind of infancy; and a few books of engravings, prepared for the use of infant and primary schools, with or even without, the

addition of appropriate letter-press, would be a very interesting and useful source of thought and conversation between teachers and children. A book of this description may be made by every teacher for his own use, by procuring a number of good cuts or drawings, and forming them into a volume, by inserting them between the leaves of a blank book of suitable size,—cutting out every other blank leaf, and pasting the picture on the next. This expedient has been found very serviceable for interesting and employing children too young to be able to read.

A *play-ground*, enclosed sufficiently for the safety of very young children, and provided to some extent with playthings of such a kind, and of such size and form, as would conduce to healthful exercise, and furnish agreeable and perhaps instructive employment, would be a valuable aid to early education. Health, cheerfulness, and tranquillity, are not merely important things in themselves, as means of immediate happiness—they are indispensable in infancy and childhood to the natural moral action of the feelings, and the successful developement of intellect. Moral energy and self-control may well supersede such aids with the adult. But the dependent condition of infancy cannot dispense with them. They are, in fact, its birthright; in a natural form of life, it is surrounded with them in abundance; and, in depriving it of these, we thwart the nature of the infant being more seriously, perhaps, than we should by withholding food and rest, or by perverting the forms in which these means of life are administered.

It should never be forgotten, that, in the education of infancy, and especially as conducted in cities, a great violence is generally done to the constitution and character of man. We take the being who is born to inherit the free air and the spacious earth, with all their wide variety of forms and colors, of motion, change, and life,—a theatre of grandeur, and beauty, and delight; we take this being, and shut him up from the healthful and fragrant atmosphere, and the inspiring light; we cut off his communication with the varied face of the earth,

with the great worlds of vegetable and animal life, and all the pure and natural pleasures of his own sensations, with the varying but ever happy thoughts to which these give rise; and we confine him to a small and perhaps disagreeable room, place him on an uncomfortable bench, put a book in his hand, and compel him to look on it, and, as far as we can, chain his mind to its mechanical influence.

To the careless eye of him who is content with the present condition and past attainments of man, and whose indolence or timidity of nature would lead him to submit to all the load of imperfection which he has himself inherited, or whose own inactivity of mind leads him to regard with a skeptic eye every attempt to render education the means of a general improvement of the intellectual and moral condition of society,—to such a mind the accumulation of evils under which infancy and childhood have been left to labor, may seem a picture of fancy. But to the eye of the mother and the teacher, whose office it is to watch the progress, and observe the impediments of the young mind, these hinderances appear in their true light. It is to these close observers only, that truth, in this form of it, can appear. And the infant school system is based on the observation and experience of mothers and elementary teachers, when it prescribes, for infant education, the use of a large, airy, cheerful room, and enjoins a frequent change of attitude, with occasional alternations of active play and of rest, or even of sleep.

The modes of city life leave very little in the power of the teacher, in regard to the happy influence of nature on the young mind. But the obligation of teachers is, in such circumstances, only rendered stronger, to use every exertion which may counteract the evils of confinement and discomfort, and to take all possible measures for cherishing in the mind those propitious states of feeling, which education so limited and embarrassed is apt to repress. A school-room in a city or a large town, may be necessarily excluded from a free access of air and light. The attentive teacher will, on this account,

double his efforts to have the internal arrangement and appearance of the room made convenient and comfortable; he will endeavour to have the children seated at as great a distance as possible from each other, and their seats contrived with express regard to free and varied postures of body; he will reserve, if possible, a clear space sufficiently large for simultaneous exercise in walking, running, and the other forms of motion natural to early childhood, and conducive to mental activity and enjoyment; he will be strictly watchful of ventilation, both in summer and in winter, so as to preserve a moderate and healthful atmosphere, in an apartment in which so large a part of every day is spent by young children; he will gratify and cheer the mind, through the medium of the eye, by agreeable and instructive pictures and other objects, suspended on the walls, since every aid to cheerfulness is a favorable impulse to the habits of mind and of body.

Primary schools in the country are exempted from the unfavorable influences of restricted space and unwholesome atmosphere. But care should be taken, in such circumstances, to keep pace, in interior arrangements, with the happy influences existing without. There is danger of the child feeling that all his pleasures lie out of the school-room, and that here alone he is to be confined and restrained, or surrounded by dulness and monotony. Teachers in the country should make liberal use of the advantages which they enjoy, for attracting the attention and impressing the imagination of childhood, by the productions of nature. These only can fully impart that silent instruction, and that innocent delight, which, although they cannot be measured by definite and tangible marks, form the most natural and the most effectual developement of mind, whether we regard its intellectual or its moral habits.

Teachers of primary schools ought, in a word, to attend to, and, as far as possible, regulate, everything that may influence early habit;—remembering that their peculiar duties render them, next to mothers, responsible for the welfare of man;

and that if there is any object for which no sacrifice of time and of exertion is too great, it is the early direction of the affections, the intellect, and the health of human beings. Teachers who are disposed to take these matters on trust, and quietly to follow in the track of custom, are unfit for the office they have assumed, and would do well to relinquish it, in favor of an employment less responsible in its nature.

The school-house or room having received its due share of attention, as a tacit but powerful influence on the mind and corporeal frame of infancy, the next step, in the order of importance, is to reform *the moral management* of the school, —to adopt a preventive, instead of a retrospective care of the mind; to act upon the individual by means of general sympathy; to break loose from the plan of observing and repressing single faults, for the moment, and to adopt a liberal and generous management, which appeals to affection and conscience, identifying itself with imagination and with character; moulding the disposition by the genial and voluntary influence of individual intellect; avoiding in every word, and tone, and look, a single expression which may indicate the presupposing of evil intention, in infantine 'faults', as they are called, but, on the contrary, rendering the teacher's measures an appeal to the heart, and a model to the imagination; and throwing, by every means, a cheerful aspect on whatever comes under the name of duty. In all these respects,the infant school system forms a striking contrast to the literal and mechanical modes of discipline, prevailing in elementary schools taught in the ordinary way.

The great moral defect in primary schools, is, that in them the management of childhood is regulated by a few arbitrary rules, and a corresponding scheme of various stages of punishment. By this narrow method, the child whose constitution inclines him to stillness of body, and negative action of mind is invested with a false merit; while the active, the buoyant, and the enterprising, carry with them, into the school-room,

a load of native guilt, which soon brings down upon its possessors the punishment which they are told it deserves.

A discipline characterised chiefly by a series of restraints, represses the action of the mind, takes away its freedom, and the whole merit and conscious pleasure of voluntary virtue. A discipline consisting principally of infliction, presents to the young mind the mean animal motive of present pain, and brings forth all the lower attributes of character,—fear, duplicity, and cunning.

The distinguishing excellence of the infant school method, is, that it addresses itself to the heart, and presents to the child the same class of motives that are employed by maternal love: it cheers and leads onward the young mind, presupposing that infant morality will always be correct, if not turned from its natural course. To create a pure and healthful conscience, which may serve as a sure guide and protecting guardian in later years, is one great aim of this happy mode of management. The teacher, therefore, does not rest satisfied with prescribing rules and penalties, but endeavours to enter into the inmost feelings of the infant being, and preserve them in their original freshness and force.

The common system of general rules and prohibitions, is faulty as a means of early culture; since it ever must fail of touching the springs of individual character. By its generality alone, not to speak of other defects, it merges the individual in the mass, and takes away much of personal responsibility and individual character, which are the only sure foundation of virtue. Its utmost limit of success is a negative compliance with a principle of convenience; and its prohibitory character, tending to repress inquiry and activity, renders it, for the most part, utterly ineffectual as a means of improvement to the mind.

The method of the infant schools appeals, on the contrary, to thought and feeling in the individual breast; it implants and cherishes those principles of rational and affectionate obedience; it cultivates those feelings of cheerfulness or of tranquil-

lity, from the absence of which rules and penalties become necessary: it is thus enabled to dispense with these formal and mechanical aids, and, rising to a higher class of mental motives, exerts a more propitious influence. It fastens on the individual mind by methods resembling those of judicious maternal management, which are always addressed to the affections or to reason, and operate not as laws but as principles.

An infant school, when rightly conducted, is made to resemble a family; the teacher taking, for a time, the place of the parent. In a word, the mind and character of the teacher are brought into direct contact with those of the children; and the management of the school depends not on a preestablished system of rules or routine of exercises, but on the immediate action of a presiding mind. No dependence is placed on formalities of any sort. The teacher endeavours rather to avoid these, and trusts to his influence over reason and affection. Instead of repressing the mind by a rule, or restraining it by a penalty, he endeavours to lift it up to intelligent views of order and duty, and to inspire it with the conscious pleasure of rectitude and self-control. To this end, he reasons and persuades; he appeals to sympathy; he calls in the aid of imagination. If the quickness of infantile emotion has, for a moment, overthrown reason, he calmly and gently endeavours to raise it again. If waywardness arises, the little offender is never made to feel the discipline of systematic resentment: he is directed to a new train of thought, by means of new objects; he is placed amidst a cheerful group of his associates, and is allowed to take part in their employments; he is presented with a picture calculated to raise an agreeable or tranquil state of feeling; or is told an appropriate and interesting story, which wins him back from his temporary mood of pain, and restores to him that balance of his infant powers, which circumstances had disturbed.

The teacher of an infant school does not come to his employment with an apparatus of regulations, prohibitions, and penalties, contrived beforehand, and happily calculated to ope-

rate as a general prescription and infallible remedy for all moral disorders: he comes to watch the infant mind in its action and tendencies, to aid and befriend it; he occasionally ventures to guide and direct it, but never thwarts it, and seldom checks it. His methods spring up at the moment; they arise out of particular occurrences, and vary with every aspect of the mind. He cherishes infantile virtue by giving it free scope and generous encouragement, rather than by soliciting or exciting it by any particular expedient: vice he anticipates and prevents, by taking away the occasions of it. *

The intellectual instruction attempted in infant schools, is not so successful, perhaps, as the moral management. It is sometimes carried much farther than the infant capacities admit, and so becomes nominal and apparent, in some particulars, more than real or beneficial. I allude, here, to the inculcation of dogmatic theology, to lessons in the nomenclature of geometry and astronomy, and to the exercise of chanting tables in arithmetic. Much, I admit, is apparently done in this way: the memory is called into use, and the children are made to seem very intelligent. But the memory thus cultivated is verbal merely; and the knowledge is that of words rather than things. This is but the exploded system of teaching by rote, revived and applied to science, instead of the columns of the spelling-book. There is no intellectual gain in such instruction; or, rather, there is no instruction given in such cases.

Leave the infant being to nature's tuition; and what a contrast is exhibited to the common, unmeaning, and mechanical process of elementary education! As soon as the infant can walk, he manifests that he has learned to discriminate forms and colors, odors and sounds, without teaching. If left to himself, he walks about in the field, picking the most beauti-

* The humorous and eccentric moralist, John Newton, has left a great legacy for teachers in that shrewd saying of his, 'Let me first fill the bushel with wheat, and then I defy any man to fill it with chaff.'

ful and fragrant plants around him. He prefers one shape of a leaf to another: he selects the most brilliant blossoms. He stops to listen to the natural melody of the birds. He watches, with sympathetic delight, the varied forms, and the free and graceful movements of the different animals he sees. In all these employments he is undergoing a discipline of attention, judgment, memory, imagination, and feeling, which the superficial observer may not trace, but which is not the less real, useful, and practical.

Appropriate instruction for infancy would be such as should follow out and regulate these tendencies of nature,—not preclude them, by an arbitrary and formal routine, as is commonly done, in what is called regular education. The infant school system is not, as yet, what it may be expected to become, after a few years more of experiment and observation shall have shed their light on this new department of instruction. It needs a still greater freedom from the shackles of previous custom. But it is deserving of all praise, in its tendency to afford a natural and generous scope to the young mind,—in its compliance with the obvious predilections of juvenile taste, in its liberal supply of those objects on which the affections of infancy and childhood naturally fasten, and by means of which they are invigorated and expanded. Pictures, and such playthings as are calculated to have a salutary effect on mind and body, are freely used in the infant schools. But it is much to be desired that the branches of knowledge, and the practical exercises, which are introduced in these and similar schools, should be such as even the infant mind could appreciate,—that *natural history*, in all those branches of it which are accessible to childhood, should be still more extensively introduced, and *taught by means of specimens or pictures, and other representations*. The capacities and propensities of the infant mind would, in this way, be equally consulted; and a vast deal of useful mental discipline on the forms and colors of objects might thus be imparted. The elements of number and combination might be drawn from the same source. Attention

and discrimination would, by such means, be successfully cultivated; memory would be usefully employed; the affections would be interested and refined; imagination would be exercised; and the whole mind would receive an intellectual impulse, favorable to elevation and purity of character.

Instruction in this department of science, however, would need to be divested of system and of nomenclature, and to be modified, in all respects, by the condition of childhood. The teacher's aim should be to elicit thought and reflection, rather than to furnish the appearance of scientific acquirements; early cultivation being regarded by him merely as a preparative for intellectual habits, and not requiring, therefore, the terms and the apparatus which belong to later stages in the pursuit of knowledge.

The rudiments of several useful accomplishments, may, no doubt, be successfully taught in early childhood. Among these would certainly be *reading*, *writing*, *and arithmetic;* —but the last two as comparatively unimportant at the early stage of infancy, and the first, rather as a happy means of promoting general habits of intelligence and of pure morality, than as a thing urgent or indispensable. A child may be well informed, comparatively, may be accustomed to excellent moral habits, may have been, in fact, well taught, without being able, as yet, to write or read or spell; and the success of a teacher who is engaged in the instruction of young children, should never be measured by the letter of attainment, even in these practical branches, but by the extent to which he has imparted the power of attention, and by his endeavours to create an inquisitive and discriminating turn of mind, or a delight in mental occupation.

The true idea of an infant or elementary school would be most fully realised by that of an infant 'lyceum,' (so to term it,) in which the main object is not to peruse any one volume, or exhaust any one science, but rather to select the instructive and the entertaining from all, to excite a general interest in

the rudiments of knowledge, and to produce a relish for intellectual pursuits.

There are but few *books* which could be mentioned, as suited to the wants of the infant mind, or successfully adapted to the business of elementary instruction. The current volumes of natural history are too extensive in their plan, or are so largely devoted to rare and foreign animals, as to be unsuitable for very young children. A book of domestic animals, with correct and neat engravings, would be very useful in this department. *Worcester's Primer* will be found serviceable to children old enough to use it. But a simpler book still would be better. *Fowle's Child's Arithmetic* is, on the whole, well adapted to its objects; so also is *Emerson's North American Arithmetic.* A *slate* and *slate pencil,* put into the hands of children who are capable of using them, with permission to draw and print, are an excellent means of employment and of improvement. The *Child's Song Book* will be found useful in any attempt to teach simple tunes to little children, and a volume of suitable drawings or engravings, selected as already mentioned, would afford much useful instruction, as well as entertainment. Such, however, is the scantiness of supply in all these departments of publication, that no book can be mentioned with exclusive or unqualified approbation. The teacher must expect to find all such aids in need of modification and improvement. He must look to the minds of his little charge themselves, to ascertain what he and they need; and he must, after all, draw largely from his own resources for methods and materials.

The great means, indeed, of improving elementary education we must look for in *the character and qualifications of teachers themselves.* One prevalent and fatal error must first be corrected,—the impression that little is required of an elementary teacher, and that any person is competent to such an office. No mistake could be more prejudicial to education

than this. To teach an elementary school, with even a moderate degree of success, demands a depth and variety of intellectual and moral qualifications, which no other office in education, in any of its departments or stages, ever requires. Eminent attainments in a single branch of science or of literature, with a facility in imparting knowledge, are all that can be justly held indispensable to instructers in what are called the higher branches of education, or in the higher order of institutions. It is not so with the elementary teacher: he must possess, in the first place, a degree of moral perfection which no other teacher has occasion to exercise; he must understand the nature of the young mind on which it is his business to operate; he must have an extensive knowledge of the physical and moral, as well as the intellectual nature, of the human being; he must possess an active imagination, an affectionate disposition, a mind judicious and ready in expedients;—in a word, a truly intellectual character. Persons who do not possess a good degree of all these qualities, are unfit for this employment; though they may become useful and respectable, and enjoy a solid happiness in pursuits less trying to the texture of the soul.

The female sex are especially adapted to the office of early instruction, by their native tenderness, their ready observation, their apparent adaptation to occupations demanding a minute and varied attention. But where shall we find that range of thought, that disciplined perfection of mind, that untiring corporeal strength, which are all indispensable to the successful teaching of infancy? To improve early education, we must afford more liberal advantages of instruction to the generality of the female sex. They themselves must take more vigorous measures to secure and prosecute the best opportunities of intellectual advancement,—not those merely which can be commanded by resorting to a distinguished school, but those, rather, which alone are worthy of the name;—extensive reading, thorough investigation, vigorous application of the individual mind to all that concerns the happiness of human beings.

To the question, 'How far can the infant school system be advantageously adopted in primary schools?' a general answer only can be given. Methods and exercises which might be both appropriate and useful in one school, and under the management of one teacher, might not be so in other circumstances; as must obviously be the case in the different condition of schools in the city, and those in the country,—of those which can be liberally supplied with books and pictures, and other means of interesting and instructing the infant mind, and in those in which the supply of materials of this description is limited. The main point to be desired, is, that the teacher should possess, in his own head and heart, the *spirit* of infant education, by which he will be enabled, in a great measure, to create the aids of which he stands in need, and to make up, by fertility in mental resource, what may be lacking in external means.

To the teacher who possesses the proper qualifications for early instruction, materials will not be scarce or difficult to command; a flower, a leaf, a grain of sand, even, if rightly presented to the attention of infancy, will afford ample materials for thought and conversation, and embrace more elements of useful knowledge and of mental pleasure, than ever can be derived from the routine of common books and formal tuition. An exact prescribed course of operation is not desirable in the instruction of young children. Their nature craves variety and change; and a judicious mode of education will regard, with as ready attention, the obvious appetites of the mind, as those of the body.

The chief things to be done, for the improvement of primary schools, or with a view to assimilate them to infant schools, may be briefly recapitulated under the following heads.

1. The attendance of very young children should be encouraged.

2. A suitable play-ground or play-room should be provided for every school.

3. Every exertion should be made to render the school-

house or room, and the school furniture, conducive to health and comfort.

4. The school exercises should be often varied, and the attitude of the children frequently changed.

5. Motion, at short intervals, should be a part of regular school exercise.

6. The school should be controlled by management rather than government.

7. A mild, affectionate, and judicious treatment of individuals, should be substituted for general laws and penalties.

8. Conscience, judgment, affection, sympathy, and not fear, should be employed, on all occasions, as means of moral influence.

9. Pictures, conversation, and stories, and, if possible, plants and animals, should be the chief sources of instruction; formal lessons being carefully avoided.

10. Exercises or lessons of any description should be very short as well as perfectly simple.

11. All lessons should be strictly adapted to the existing powers and capacities of infancy or childhood: nothing should be taught which is to be understood by and by. The true way of teaching a child is not to anticipate or to inculcate anything, but to exercise his faculties on objects to which they are at present equal; leaving the result to take place in its own good time.

12. All learning by rote should be most carefully avoided.

13. Whilst uniform succession of employments, and mechanical routine, are strictly shunned, regard should always be had to the different states of mind and body in which school hours can be most advantageously spent. The first part of school time should be devoted to the direct influence of the teacher's mind on his pupils, by conversation or instruction; the second portion, perhaps, to the action of the children's own minds, in telling again to their teacher the story he has read or told to them;—in writing, (if old enough,) what they remember of it, on their slates; in reading, drawing, counting,

or in any other form of mental activity. The third portion may be given up to play or recreation of any proper kind. The fourth to the contemplation of pictures, or to hearing or joining in simple strains of music, or hearing or saying appropriate pieces of poetry. Bodily exercise should be connected with many, if not most, of these exercises; and rest and sleep, if necessary, should be interspersed with action. But much of all such arrangements must be left to circumstances, or rather to the exercise of individual judgment in the teacher.

14. Children old enough to be instructed in the common elements of school education, should be taught, as nearly as may be, in the manner adopted with the youngest class of pupils,—by rational, interesting, and practical methods.—Few or no books being exactly adapted to the instruction of children in reading, an expedient such as the following may be advantageously adopted. Let the teacher be provided with a large black board or slate; and when he can find a large, well drawn and well colored picture of an animal, or of any other object intelligible and interesting to childhood, let it be suspended over the black board: let the children be asked a few simple *questions* about the form, the color, and the habits of the animal,—if such is the object selected. The ideas elicited by these questions, should be embodied, by the teacher, in a few short and easy *sentences* of familiar words, and *printed*, in large and distinct letters, (capitals, perhaps,) on the black board. Every sentence, (and there should be very few,) should then be slowly and distinctly *read aloud* by the teacher, and repeated several times; the children being permitted to join their voices with his. The next stage of the exercise is, that the teacher should select a few of the prominent *words* of the lesson, and place them in a column by themselves clearly and distinctly printed. These the children should compare with those contained in the regular sentences, pronouncing them distinctly along with the teacher. Two or three of the *letters* which happen to occur oftenest in the words printed, should now be selected and placed by themselves, in large and dis-

tinct form, and be compared with those which occur in the words of the lesson, and their names, or rather, their sounds, distinctly repeated by the teacher and the pupils. Those of the children who are of sufficient age and ability, should now attempt to transcribe the whole or part of the lesson, on a large black board or slate, placed conveniently for them. The youngest should be furnished, each with a few sets of letters pasted on small blocks of wood, or with plates of tin with the letters of the alphabet stamped upon them. With these letters they may 'set up,' or compose, the lesson for themselves on the flat part of the surface of their desks, or on a common school slate. Reading and spelling may thus be taught simultaneously, and in the form of active and pleasant employment, while counting the letters and telling their forms may serve, if rightly managed, to impress on the mind some useful elementary ideas in arithmetic and geometry. These exercises should be continued, perhaps, during the whole of the time that children are employed in learning to read; the nature of the exercise being adapted progressively to the capacity of the learners, and embracing the elements of intellectual and moral discipline, by a proper attention to the subject of every lesson.

Books, when suitable ones can be obtained, may be ultimately employed instead of the lesson on the teacher's board; and the pupils may now be accustomed to vary the language of the story by substituting their own forms of expression. A few of the words of every lesson may be selected to be defined and embodied in sentences, on the slate, by the children themselves. Clear and distinct conceptions will thus be acquired, and the meaning and force of language receive their true and full value. Subsequently, the pupils may be permitted to write a letter or story, on their slates, and read it to their teacher. By this means the false tones of voice usually acquired from the formality of school exercises, may be avoided, and a natural and appropriate elocution acquired; the basis of it having been already secured in the distinct and correct enun-

ciation of words and letters, in the elementary lessons before mentioned.

15. The elements of penmanship may be very conveniently taught, so far at least as regards the forms of letters, by the use of the black board and the slate.

16. Simple exercises in arithmetic may be prescribed in the same way.

17. Formal lessons in geometry and astronomy can only prove useless, or worse than useless, to very young children. But a few of the solids, corresponding to the shapes of common objects, may be used, to good advantage, as the basis of correct ideas of form. Thus far apparatus and other illustrations may prove highly useful.

18. Teachers of elementary schools should, if possible, prepare themselves for teaching the rudiments of drawing and singing.*

19 A great means of immediate improvement in the business of teaching, may be found in the opportunities afforded by the instruction imparted at the meetings of Lyceums and teachers' associations; if these are aided, as they always should be, by the use of an extensive and well-selected library, and are regarded as merely the outer gates of knowledge, whose inmost treasures are never to be won but by the efforts of individual diligence and personal investigation.

* Much assistance, in relation to vocal music, may be justly expected from a work now in press, compiled by Mr Lowell Mason, from materials collected by Mr William Woodbridge, during his residence in Germany and Switzerland.

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